

The University of Chicago

NATURALISM AND
SUPERNATURALISM IN E. W. LYMAN'S
PHILOSOPHY

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

1937

By
ERNEST LEON SNODGRASS

Private Edition, Distributed by
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LIBRARIES
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

1939

The University of Chicago

NATURALISM AND
SUPERNATURALISM IN E. W. LYMAN'S
PHILOSOPHY

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

1937

By
ERNEST LEON SNODGRASS

Private Edition, Distributed by
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LIBRARIES
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

1939



SUMMARY

The dominant features of three aspects of Professor Eugene William Lyman's philosophy of religion are reviewed in this thesis. They are his epistemology, his theism, and his pragmatic interests. The examination of them sought to distinguish the naturalism and the supernaturalism which they involve. Professor Lyman's philosophy of religion is seen to partake of elements to be found in naturalism and yet to stop short of the rigors which that position requires, to introduce elements that are definitely supernaturalistic. He thus mediates between the two dominant currents in present religious thought. The consistent purpose of the thesis is to clarify the distinction between these two currents and to distinguish them in the philosophy under review.

The technique is that of comparison with and criticism from the standpoint of the naturalistic formulation. Delineation of a supernaturalism necessarily involves an understanding of the natural to which anything else that may exist is super. Thus much of the material in the thesis is by way of the forging of this instrument by which the philosophy under review might be examined. This instrument is called naturalism, and the naturalistic and the supernaturalistic elements of Professor Lyman's thought are presented throughout by use of the naturalistic views.

It is believed that the elemental distinction between naturalism and supernaturalism is at the point of theory of knowledge. Beliefs partake of supernaturalism primarily by virtue of the way they are thought to be known. The first aspect of Professor Lyman's thought to be considered, therefore, was the theory of knowledge.

However, it was first shown that Professor Lyman's ideas of God are presented not merely as logical conceptions or as functionally significant beliefs, but as existentially true. He was identified as a religious realist, by which is meant that he holds two basic views. They are, first, that God is an objective fact of existence with an ontological status independent of man's knowledge and, second, that knowledge of God is possible: there are

ways of knowing, of discovering God as existentially true. It is by virtue of this fundamental position that the project essayed in the thesis becomes relevant. For naturalism is concerned also with existential truth, and naturalism is primarily a way of knowing reality. The problem regarding Professor Lyman's philosophy of religion emerges because he believes in the naturalistic way of knowing and also in other ways of knowing which are thought to disclose aspects of reality (his idea of God) not fully accessible to the naturalistic way. There is no disjunction in reality thus explored, however, and each of the several ways of knowing is relevant and supplementary to the others in the enterprise of gaining knowledge. Thus both naturalism and supernaturalism eclectically or mediationally enter Professor Lyman's thought, and this fact gives the problem of the thesis and makes applicable to that problem the method of approach from the standpoint of naturalism.

Naturalism does not deny the existential truth of any concept unless the supposed reality is inaccessible to the naturalistic way of knowing. If it cannot be known in that way, it is supernature. And that is where the supernaturalism of Professor Lyman's philosophy appears: he advocates the existence of something that must be known in ways other than the specified naturalistic way.

But what is the naturalistic way of knowing? This was discussed as "The Naturalistic Meaning of Existential Truth." Anything is knowable by the effects it displays. Thus, the criterion for existential truth in the naturalistic meaning is observation of effects, of changes wrought by the entity under consideration in the system of which it is a part. Knowing, however, involves more than awareness of the impingement of these effects on the psycho-physical organism. That is, there must be concepts. This is only to say that questions must be formulated, hypotheses must be held, and the effects observed by the aid of that conceptual apparatus. This point in the naturalistic way of knowing may be summarized by saying that the facts do not speak for themselves but only answer our questions. The asking of questions involves the taking of a perspective toward the reality under consideration and the examining of it by the aid of concepts. It is the hypothesizing of probable results from a way of behaving in regard to the object and then observation of what happens.

This is experimental testing. There are many interpretative

approaches to reality possible. One that is found to be a confirmed ordering of experience is acknowledged as existentially true. However, relativism obtains in all such assertions. Finality is not asserted under the naturalistic view, but only relative degrees of confirmation. Tentativeness is urged at all time. Tentativeness does not mean uncertainty but openness to new knowledge and further experimental testing.

Professor Lyman is seen to hold that this way of knowing is valid--that reality is disclosed by it--but also that there are other ways of knowing. Religion can make a valid contribution to knowledge of reality. Specifically, he urges the validity of faith, intuition, and religious experience as pathways to further objective truth. The author's thought on these points is summarized together with the insistence that these ways of knowing are especially relevant for knowledge of value as an objective fact. This means knowledge of God. And it is seen that for Professor Lyman knowledge gained in these ways must be tested by reason and practical living. That is, all insights require synthesis with truths discovered by other ways of knowing. Judgments in religion must not be held against other evidence. But these ways of knowing are seen to present evidence not otherwise accessible, and when the truths to which they point are tested by reason and found to be not inconsistent and practical to live by, they should not be denied as reports on reality.

With naturalism's perspective, observation, reason, and experimental testing and Professor Lyman's supernaturalistic ways thus summarized, their confrontation was the next step necessary for the development of the thesis. It is this step that makes possible the drawing of the line of demarcation between the naturalistic and the supernaturalistic elements in Professor Lyman's philosophy of religion. And as the examination was made by use of the specified method of naturalism it was discovered that Professor Lyman's concept of faith can be translated into the naturalistic concept of perspective. Special use was made in this connection of the emphasis now being made in the sociology of knowledge, that the general outlook in which one participates is exceedingly important in what he finds to be the facts about reality. The cognitive act occurs within a situation which is understood or interpreted relative to the special perspective which one happens to

have. Faith in Professor Lyman's thought is understood as the value-perspective toward reality, and there is nothing in naturalism that would imply an a priori denial of its validity. On the contrary, naturalism stresses the positive cognitive importance of such biases. Thus understood, faith is not a distinctive way of knowing but it is the religious approach to experience, and no conflict between the two positions is discernible in this regard and no supernaturalism is necessarily affirmed.

Along the same lines, it was found that intuition, as it is developed in Professor Lyman's thought, is not other than the conceptual element recognized as necessary in the naturalistic way of knowing. Careful scrutiny of what the author says about intuition, and the pointing out of criticisms inherent in his own exposition, yields the conclusion that it is the gaining of an interpretative apparatus by which the flow of events might be understood. Epistemologically the situation is not altered, no supernaturalism is necessarily involved, and, as Professor Lyman makes especially plain, intuitive insights from the religious perspective also require testing.

The supernaturalism of Professor Lyman's philosophy appears at this point of testing. For him, the test is that of rational consistency, or the degree with which the given judgment permits synthesis with, or itself synthesizes, what is known. It is shown that naturalism also esteems reason but that it goes further and requires that the judgment be referred to, and confirmed by, empirical or perceptual data. This is the initial demarcation indicated between naturalism and supernaturalism in Professor Lyman's philosophy. Incident to this discussion there is a consideration of the difference between what Professor Lyman means by religious experience and the naturalistic demand for empirical confirmation. The discussion brought out that the distinction at this point is that of the difference between indeterminate psychic states and consciousness of the impingement of determinate objective reality upon the psycho-physical organism. The chapter discussing the confrontation of naturalism and Professor Lyman's thought in epistemology was concluded by consideration of two of the tensions to which Professor Lyman responds. The first is the inadequacies with which he charges "the sciences, physical and human." These inadequacies are: exclusion of the aspects of reality which concern religion (value) and the inability of the scientific method to

deal with these religious aspects. The second tension is seen to be regarding the existential status of God. It was pointed out that naturalism concurs in the view that there are many perspectives and that mathematical or mechanical modes of thought are not exclusively valid. What is needful according to naturalism is precisely the more inclusive perspective for which Professor Lyman appeals. But existential truth, including truth about God, is not discovered by appeal to peculiar ways of knowing. And it is recalled that Professor Lyman offers no supernatural way of knowing but that supernaturalism enters his philosophy by way of his view that the test of reason is sufficient, without observational data. This is the line of demarcation between naturalism and supernaturalism in his theory of knowledge.

From distinctions in epistemology the discussion turned to consideration of the existential reference of Professor Lyman's conception of God. The transition was from how a proposition is said to be known to what is offered as knowledge, specifically in theistic belief. Professor Lyman's views were summarized--God is the underlying union of fact and value, personal, transcendent, and immanent. God is a Conscious Mind purposing values and actively working to bring them to pass. He is the ultimate world-ground, behind the processes of the world and therefore transcending the world, although there is freedom, and time is real for God. God's conscious purposes (intent) are eternal, although the traditional conception of absolute foreknowledge is rejected. God, though super-organic, is also immanent, being creatively present throughout the processes as a creator of value. The effort was made to state clearly the views in this regard and then to summarize the arguments for their defense, the rational grounds for his views which Professor Lyman indicates. As the arguments were summarized, a critical appraisal was given of some of them and their relevance for his theistic views was discussed. His main argument revolves about the new philosophy of organism, which Professor Lyman accepts as a corrective of the old mechanistic mode of thought. But he thinks this new view also inadequate because it makes no provision for the transcendent conscious purposes of God. This last Professor Lyman believes to be an inevitable conclusion to the continuity of order and organization which the processes of the universe display. He argues this view from what is known in cosmology, in biology, and in human history. The

progress in these spheres which Professor Lyman discerns is sufficient to him to witness the reality of God as a Cosmic Purposing Power.

The theistic material thus summarized, the next step in the thesis was the effort to distinguish the naturalistic and supernaturalistic elements in it, again by use of naturalism as the tool for drawing the line of demarcation. The technique grows out of the realization that what is knowable by the naturalistic method is natural, while supernature is anything that must be known in other ways. And the first supernaturalistic factor pointed to in the theism under review is the view that value is autonomous and may exist independently of the processes or entities of reality. This position naturalism cannot accept; it is at once baffled by the suggestion that there is knowledge of something outside of, beyond, other-than the world-process, and it can only ask, how is it known? Professor Lyman's reply about intuition and faith and religious experience does not satisfy the naturalistic thinker, as has been seen, and the conception of value as intrinsic and non-relational is seen to be definitely supernaturalistic.

Attention was then turned to the evidences which Professor Lyman cites for his idea of God. These evidences are: the order which the universe displays (cosmology), the emergence of new levels of value (biology), and human progress (creative personalities and the growth of culture). Naturalism concurs in the judgments that there is order and organic character on a vast scale in the universe and that there is a reality working for the increase of value (harmonious interaction), but it is denied that a super-organic Creative Intelligence behind the processes of the universe is necessary to explain these phenomena. On the contrary, the naturalistic insistence is that this hypothesis explains nothing but only takes the inquirer from the observable events and relations of the world to a speculative point "beyond." The idea of God becomes a reservoir for what is not known. And the concept of an Eternal Mind behind the processes does not permit experimental testing, it could not be known, and it is not necessary to account for the observable facts of experience. The naturalistic criticism of the various arguments in Professor Lyman's exposition was given, the naturalistic response to the various issues shown, and thus the line of demarcation between the supernaturalism and the naturalism in Professor Lyman's theism was made.

The materials of the thesis so far summarized show Professor Lyman's theism to include several points with which naturalism takes no exception; they constitute the naturalism of his idea of God. They may be stated as follows: the perspective of religion toward reality is the value-perspective; the principle of value is the maximum of harmonious interaction between the entities of the universe; there are possibilities of value not yet actualized; there is order, harmonious interaction or organic mutuality in the universe; and there is that which yields this value, a value-producing Power. The next step in the thesis was to review a strictly naturalistic philosophy of religion--that of Professor Henry Nelson Wieman--in order to illustrate concretely the naturalistic method in theism and to demonstrate the completion of the naturalistically acceptable features of Professor Lyman's thought by a view of God as natural. In this way naturalism in theism was clarified, as it had been in epistemology, and the naturalism and the supernaturalism in Professor Lyman's philosophy became clear on theism also: naturalistic theism agrees that there is a value-producing Power yielding effects that are observable in the processes of existence, but it does not follow in the idea of a Cosmic Mind behind the processes, for it discerns no way of knowing such a reality.

The final chapter of the thesis summarized the pragmatic values derived from belief in the Supernatural according to Professor Lyman. They were presented as the feelings of social and cosmic kinship, power, insight, moral integrity, and wonder, and special mention was made of the feeling of a challenge to fight evil and of belief in immortality. In naturalism these states of consciousness have pragmatic value only as they contribute to the success of man's endeavor to order life in conformity to, and for the growth of what is in fact the Supreme Good. This is the emphasis of naturalism in the philosophy of religion.

This summarizing description of the development of the thesis indicates the more important elements in Professor Lyman's philosophy that are naturalistic and those that are supernaturalistic. There is no clear distinction between naturalism and Professor Lyman's understanding of how the knowing process develops, and he does not question the cognitive value of findings under the naturalistic method. Supernaturalism appears in this connection by his willingness to admit as existential truth judgments which

are reasonable though without observational or empirical data. In theism he becomes supernaturalistic by thinking of God as a Conscious Purpose behind the processes of the universe rather than as just that naturalistically discoverable reality among the processes which makes for the increase of value and is therefore the Supremely Worthful. And his pragmatic values partake of supernaturalism when he deals with these states of consciousness having pragmatic value as bases for belief in an existential reality not accessible to the naturalistic way of knowing.

